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ABSTRACT

An examination of the relevant literature reveals that "policy" means different things to different people. Among the concepts that emerge when these meanings are reviewed are that policies are intentional, decision-based, goal-oriented, and conditional; they lead to results, balance facts and values, and allocate resources; and they emerge as the result of an informed process. The policy process is generally understood as a progression from initiation through selection and implementation to review. This progression may be affected by pressures to select and implement policies before all the relevant information has been gathered. To control the flow of information, an information system should be established that provides adequate data and analytic feedback at all steps in the process. Once the process is established, it can be twisted into a spiral form that can generate successive policies in given policy areas as goals are achieved. With increasing responsibility for the education of Canada's Indians devolving on trained Indian educators, it is important for these new policy-makers to be very clear in their definitions of policy, to recognize the significance of information and analysis to the policy process, and to be conscious of their own roles in the process. A two-page bibliography concludes the document. (PGD)

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A Policy Process Model as a Tool of Educational Governance

Introduction

Most organizations attempt to set their goals and intents through what they understand to be the creation of policies. Local education authorities, such as those that have been created to steer band-run or band-controlled schools, seem to be no exception. Indeed, in this way they are similar to most other organizations of governance, whether they be municipal governments, school boards, cabinets, or band councils.

In general, however, some observers have noted that in many instances policies as stated seem to have little to do with the attainment of intended goals (Jenkins, 1978). Waller (1983) suggests that this is the case because those involved in the making of policies very often have difficulty in thinking clearly when they are confronted with confusing and/or complex information. Through avoidance, ignorance, or desperation, policy makers often

> "press whatever feasible-looking policy lever or decision button that comes into view. The results are familiar: policies and decisions that ramify into dazzling configurations of unintended results" (1983:282).

The intents of policies appear frequently to be thwarted because of factors that decrease the rationality of the policy-making process. Waller has just identified two of these factors as: (i) the complexity of information; and (ii) the performance of policy actors as they act out their roles. It may also be the case that there is a failure to

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realize that policy choice is but one act in a process that is very complex and involves much more than a single, simple act of choice.

It is the case that education councils and education authorities are today in Canada moving toward increased control of local education. In this move, increasing responsibility for educational governance falls on the shoulders of both elected and appointed authority and council members, as well as the growing number of professionally-trained and credentialled native Indian educators. It would seem reasonable that with such increasing responsibility for educational governance, such educators aquire as much expertise and knowledge as possible about policy, policy-making, and governance, for without the expertise and knowledge, the problems which Waller (1983) has identified above may not be overcome.

In light of the increasing responsibility for educational governance on the part of education councils, and remembering that dazzling configurations of unintended results often stem from uninformed or perhaps even desperate policy makers, the purpose of this paper is to communicate some basic knowledge about the policy field. The object of this communication will be to provide a background to understanding a useful model of the policy process. Such knowledge and understanding, even when communicated in the truncated form of a paper such as this, should assist in moving native Indian groups ever closer to Indian control of Indian education -- and hopefully such knowledge and understanding will serve to inform policy makers and perhaps reduce the desperation of some policy-making to a level of comfortable and controllable urgency.

Understanding Policy

The two central assumptions underlying this paper are as follows:

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- policy as a concept is not well understood
- policy as a process is not well understood

In order to address these two assumptions and hopefully increase the understanding of both what policy has been thought to be and what the policy process has been thought to be, this portion of the paper will be divided into sections appropriate to each assumption.

What is Policy? The scope of this paper does not permit a comprehensive review of the policy-relevant literature; however, the sample which follows provides some familiarity with a range of alternative perspectives and definitions. Major points from these alternatives are assembled in order to provide a general notion of what the term "policy" is thought to mean. This notion provides a context for the development and elaborations of a useful model of the policy process.

Some attempts at definition of the term "policy" do not appear to be particularly useful. Helco's cryptic observation that "[p]olicy is not a self-evident term" (1972:84) sets the stage for multiple and perhaps confusing referents. This view is reinforced by Cunningham's comment, made perhaps with tongue in cheek, that "policy is rather like an elephant -- you recognize it when you see it, but cannot easily define it" (cited by Carley, 1980:47).

Other definitions have been suggested that are both more specific and perhaps more useful. Echoing Waller's focus on outcomes, Hardin suggests that policies are to be judged by their consequences (1985:104). Meehan defines policy as general decisions that serve as rules, precedents, or guidelines for future decisions (1973:8-9). Easton adds the value dimension by suggesting that policy is "a web of decisions and actions that allocate...values" (1953:130), while Jenkins intro-

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duces the notion of ends and means, seeing policy as "a set of interrelated decisions...concerning the selection of goals and the means of achieving them within a specified situation" (1978:15).

Wildavsky also suggests the blending of ends and means, stating that "[p]olicy is a process as well as a product. It is used to refer to a process of decision-making and also to the product of that process" (1979:387). Bauer adds the notions of time, deliberation, and information to the mixture by suggesting that the term refers to types of decisions and actions which have "the widest ramifications and the longest time perspective, and...require the most information and contemplation" (1968:2). Anderson (1975) echoes this view by suggesting that policy involves a pattern of action extending over time and involving many decisions.

Mann suggests that expertise and specialization are involved in policy; he observes that we are all targets or consumers of policy, that some of us implement policy, and that very few of us actually make policy (1975:6). Downey (1982) echoes Easton and suggests that policy can be thought of as a balancing of facts and values which in turn drives the allocation of resources.

Dubnick and Bardes suggest that it is possible to come to a better understanding of what policies are by recognizing them as responses to problems. They also suggest, however, that policies may be aimed not only at solution, but may also have a hand in generating problems -- not unlike Waller's (1983) introductory remarks about unintended outcomes of policy decisions. Dubnick and Bardes imply that unintended outcomes of policy may indeed be construed as a "policy problem."

This differentiation suggests that policy problems may be usefully examined to add to the notion of what policy is. Mann

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(1975) assists us in this regard. He suggests that policy problems -- those that tend to elicit a policy-making response from policy makers, and those which may be the unintended outcomes of policies so made -- are those which are: (i) public in nature; (ii) very consequential; (iii) complex; (iv) dominated by uncertainty; and (v) affected by and reflective of disagreement about goals that are to be pursued (1975: 11).

The notion of policy problems either stimulating policy-making responses, or resulting from efforts at policy-making illuminates contrasting perspectives regarding what are thought to be policy problems, and underscores contrasting approaches to dealing with such problems through policy-making.

The foregoing ideas about and definitions of policy, and policy problems, clearly indicate that the term "policy" means different things to different people. So, it may very well be that the three problems which Waller identified in the introduction to this paper -- the factors which decrease the rationality of the policy-making process: complexity of information, performance of policy actors, and the complex context of policy choice -- may be grounded in differing conceptions of the meaning of "policy."

But where does one go from here to establish a useful concept of policy? How does one include notions of conflict in the goals of policy, or differences of opinion as to whether facts or values are most significant in policy-making? One obvious direction would be to briefly summarize what has been reviewed and to work to extract what appear as major themes. The major points that emerge from an admittedly incomplete review of the meanings of the term "policy" are as follows:

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- policy is created with intent so that organizations may reach their goals
- policy is seen as a plan, or a course of action
- policy is conditional and is governed by rules
- policy is a decision, or a series of decisions
- policy is consequential -- it has results
- policy balances facts and values, which implies that policy may embody as well as attempt to accommodate conflicting goals
- policy allocates resources which are often limited
- policy aims to resolve problems which may be obstacles to the attainment of goals
- policy may create problems or perpetuate obstacles to goal attainment
- policy emerges as a result of a process, a sequence of events
- policy requires information; policy-making must be informed
- policy results from specialized activities, often executed within specialized roles, within organizations

One major theme that emerges from the above is that policy results from a process, a sequence of events and decisions aimed at achieving a solution to a perceived problem. Let us proceed from that major theme to consider the policy process -- that process which produces policy.

What is the Policy Process? The term "policy process," like the term "policy," has received many different interpretations. For example, Lynn suggests that

> "[the policy process] moves through time-consuming stages, beginning with...recognition that a problem exists, to the adoption of laws or a combination of measures aimed at dealing with aspects of the problem (which may take a long time and may never happen)

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> to the establishment and operation of a program, to evaluation, review, and modification -- but seldom death" (1978:17).

The policy process has been schematically represented as an orderly sequence of steps leading to policy decision. Brewer and de Leon, for example, suggest that the policy process may be illustrated as follows in Figure 1:

1. Initiation: characterized by creative thinking, definition of objectives, innovation option design, tentative and preliminary exploration of concepts, claims, and possibilities.
2. Estimation: characterized by thorough investigation of concepts and claims; scientific examination of the impacts of continuing to do nothing and of each considered intervention option; normative examination of likely consequences; development of program outlines; establishment of expected performance criteria and indicators.
3. Selection: characterized by debate of possible outcomes; compromises, bargains, and accommodations; reduction of uncertainty about options; integration of ideological and other nonrational elements of decision; decisions among options; assignment of executive responsibility.
4. Implementation: characterized by development of rules, regulations, and guidelines to carry out decision; modification of decision to reflect operational constraints, including incentives and resources; translation of decision into operational terms; setting up program goals and standards, including schedule of operations.
5. Evaluation: characterized by comparison of expected and actual performance levels according to established criteria; assignment of responsibility for discovered discrepancies in performance.
6. Termination: characterized by determination of costs, consequences, and benefits for reductions and closures; amelioration as necessary and required; specification of new problems created during termination.

Figure 1: A Concpetualization of the Policy Process

[Brewer, Garry D., and Peter de Leon (1983:76)]

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Following a similar pattern of step-wise progression, Downey suggests that the policy process may be understood as illustrated in Figure 2:

1. Initiation -- taking stock, assessing resources and constraints, seeking opportunities
2. Creation -- conceiving of alternatives, imagining 'what ifs'
3. Estimation/Choice -- testing for feasibility, anticipating the unintended, selecting
4. Action -- directing and controlling, motivating, and incentives
5. Review -- assessment, termination, renewal, re - direction

Figure 2: A Conceptualization of the Policy Process

[Downey, L.W., (1985:23)]

Lynn (1980) emphasizes two important aspects of the role which time plays in the policy process -- aspects which can be readily applied to the two above-mentioned representations of the policy process. First is the idea that certain components or steps in the process -- such as the gathering or synthesis of data, and analysis of information -- may take a long time to complete. Second, and almost paradoxically, Lynn also mentions the idea that the point of reaching a decision to implement, to put a program into place with the objective of reaching a desired outcome or goal, or to evaluate, or to terminate, may be reached well in advance of full information which may still be in the process of being collected or synthesized -- information which could conceivably have an impact on the direction or nature of the policy decision made.

It is entirely possible that a policy decision-maker might feel very strongly disposed to proceed towards a decision

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that discounts the unknown variables and incorporates only those that are known. Such a situation may allow a policy decision-maker to press one of Waller's convenient policy decision buttons that produce unintended results. Further, Downey (1982; 1985) has observed that the policy process as sketched out in the two examples above may be "short-circuited" by policy decision-makers who do not wish to have technically-rational factors interfere with the political goals of a particular policy decision. Certainly in such a situation a policy decision is reached; however, it is arguable whether or not a true "policy process" has been followed.

The foregoing illustrates the dangers of assuming, in any given policy problem situation, that either a fact-oriented approach, or a values-oriented approach, will move the policy process through to the generation of suitable policy decisions. The foregoing also illustrates something more of the terrain of policy studies, dominated as it is with what may be a predisposition for fact-oriented analyses, which suggests in turn that the policy process may indeed prominently feature what Lindblom (1959) has called disjointed incremental coping strategies.

These observations lead us to a consideration of what role or roles information might play in the policy process, for it has been mentioned time and again; and, as has just been noted, may or may not be used to either steer or short-circuit the policy process.

How would the policy process function without information? Could it function? How would it function with only random information crashing down in great disordered heaps upon policy actors? Clearly, information systems must inform the policy process, and for this to occur rationally such systems must be controlled and ordered according to some relatively consistent

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view of what is to be considered as important or relevant information.

The notion of informing the policy process can be thought of in terms of information systems being directed to carry out certain functions based on decisions reached at various points along the policy process, as well as feeding information back to the process at virtually any point.

Figure 3 provides another conception of the policy process, a conception which is, in part, an amalgam of the preceding two conceptions as well as a somewhat more linear conception of the process first advanced by Jenkins (1978). More importantly, it is also a conception which invites consideration of the ways in which information systems might become a part of the policy process. Figure 3 establishes, for the purposes of this paper, the first step in the development of a useful model of the policy process, for it is with this model that the sequential steps of the various conceptions of the policy process can be clearly seen -- and as you may recall it is the purpose of this paper to not only communicate some basic knowledge about the policy field but to provide a background to understanding a useful model of the policy process.

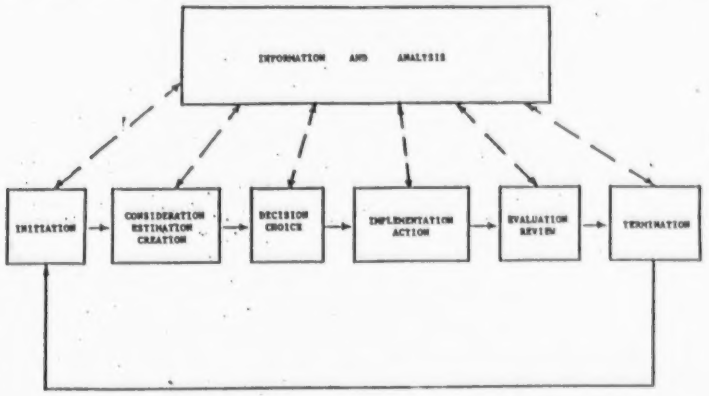

Figure 3: A Conceptualization of the Policy Process
[adapted from Brewer and de Leon, Downey, and Jenkins]

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Now, one might well ask if any of the component parts of the process depicted in Figure 3 might be any more critical to its effective functioning than any other. The immediate answer would seem to be "no," because all of the parts of the process as identified in the model are integral to that process, so no one step could reasonably be thought of as any more or less important than any other. Put another way, if one were to eliminate any of the steps identified in Figure 3, one could no longer call it a model of the policy process. If we can accept that all components as identified are indeed integral and essential to the process, we might usefully ask if there are any factors which are not integral to the process but might affect the overall functioning of the process?

One factor has already been identified as a possible determinant of the effectiveness of the policy process: informing. What does one do with information, especially in relation to what has emerged as a model of the policy process? One analyzes information. Thus the second factor would seem to be the analytical capabilities available to the policy process. Indeed, these two factors are precisely those identified by Waller as those which, in particular circumstances, have a very strong potential of reducing the rationality of policy-making.

Reinforcing the notion that these two factors are important, Richelson (1985) observes that informed policy-making requires adequate information and analysis. Without a useful information system, the environment cannot be scanned and the policy process has nothing to respond to or work from; simply put, the policy process must be informed to be functional. Without analytic power, the information received cannot be considered or weighed, estimations and projections are impossible, monitoring cannot occur, scenarios cannot be generated, strategies cannot be planned nor implementations designed, evaluations

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cannot be initiated or executed, and feedback cannot occur. The intelligence of the policy process would seem to be completely dependent upon, and partially defined by, its informing and analysis capabilities.

At this point it is possible to go one step further in the elaboration of a useful model of the policy process. To do so it will be necessary to consider the steps outlined in Figure 3, and twist them into a spiral so that it is possible to move from the first step of initiation, through the intermediate steps of the process to the point of termination, but at this point we can find ourselves at the beginning of the process we have just completed but <u>on a different level.</u> We have moved to a different level not only by virtue of having moved along the policy process, but also by virtue of the nature of the intelligence of the policy process itself. It might be said that the rate at which policy problems are successfully addressed will be defined by the movement along the axis of the spiral created by the twisting of the steps of the policy process, and will be dependent upon the extent to which intelligence is used to power that movement.

<u>A Grounded Example.</u> What is being suggested here can be illustrated by the following example which compares two policy decision-making groups. A group a policy decision-makers that finds itself proceeding through the steps of the policy process can be very unintelligent about its use of information. If it is unintelligent about its use of information, proceeding through the policy process will do little but move the group around in a tight circle back to where they started from: they will have made no progress along the axis of the spiral which could be created from intelligent use of information, and the will be faced with the same problem that caused them to beging the policy process in the first place.

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On the other hand, a second group of policy decision-makers that finds itself proceeding through the steps of the policy process may make very intelligent use of information. If this is the case, their progression through the policy process will move them along the axis that defines the centre point of the spiral, and they will find that they have moved through the policy process such that they have effectively dealt with the initial policy problem that caused them to begin the policy process in the first place.

The relative progress of these two hypothetical groups can be found schematically represented in Figure 4:

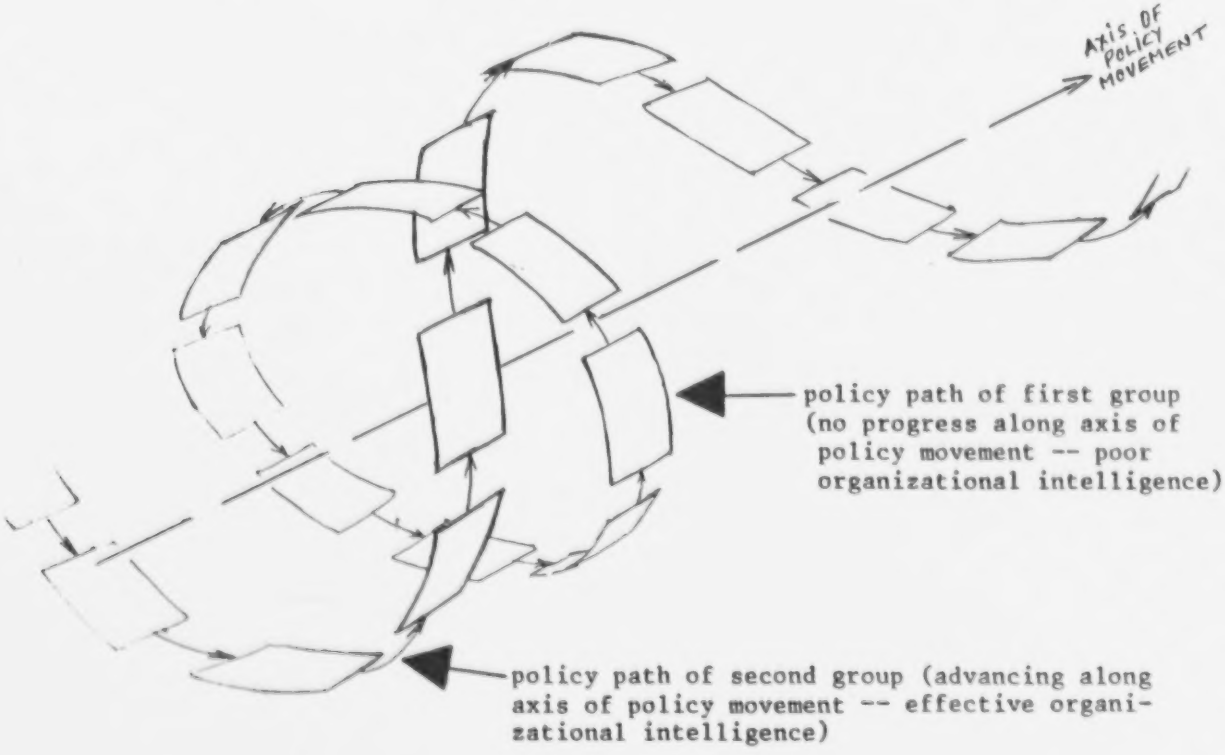
AXIS OF POLICY MOVEMENT
policy path of first group (no progress along axis of policy movement -- poor organizational intelligence)
policy path of second group (advancing along axis of policy movement -- effective organizational intelligence)

Figure 4: An Elaboration of the Policy Process -- Policy Movement Through Intelligence

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Implications

Where, one might usefully ask, does this overview of the terms "policy" and "policy process" leave us in relation to Indian control of Indian Education? Here we might recall the assertion made at the beginning of this paper that increasing responsibility for educational governance is falling to education authority and council members, as well as professionally-trained and credentialled native Indian educators, and that this increasing responsibility demands increased expertise and knowledge in the fields of policy, policy-making, and governance.

The overview of what policy has been thought to mean has demonstrated the divergence of views on this topic, the apparent lack of clarity and agreement regarding definition of the term -- and above all, the complexity of the term. Indeed, it might be said that the term "policy" is a term that carries very dense meaning, meaning that is not easily explicated. The overview of the policy process, ending with an elaboration of a schematic representation of the process into three dimensions that accounts for and portrays movement in terms of policy development, the cyclical nature of the policy process, and the step-wise progression of the steps of that process, suggests that how an organization reaches policy decisions and makes progress in terms of policy development is extremely complicated.

However, a brief summary of points to consider in the development of improved "policy literacy" may prove to be very useful. First it is important to realize that those who are responsible for policy decisions in local education authorities -- the education council members, the chairperson of the authority, and perhaps the education administrator of the authority -- must be very clear about what they mean by the term "policy." Clearly, if one reflects on the steps contained in the policy process, "policy" is not what one does given certain circumstances. If

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one believes that one can develop, or turn to, a policy as a patterned response to a particular problem, then one is confusing policy with procedure. Indeed, procedure is very important in the administration of policies, as in when policies are implemented, but to assume that the procedures of implementation are synonymous with policy is a grave error. One must remember that policies ought to be thought of in terms of what an organization wishes to have happen, not how it is to get it to happen.

Second, it is important to recognize the significance of information and analysis in combination -- that is, it is important to recognize the significance of intelligence in relation to the development and organizational policies. How an organization collects, stores, and makes use of information -- and especially how an organization analyzes information for the purposes of informing the policy process -- is extremely important to the relative success of that process. Here we should recall how the axis of the spiral of steps of the process can be understood to denote the direction of policy progress, and that the extent to which an organization analyzes the information it is capable of gathering will determine whether or not the spiral is followed in an expanded or a constricted fashion. It was pointed out earlier that a group of policy decision makers which does not make good use of organizational intelligence to inform its policy decisions will not make much progress -- indeed, the spiral path they follow might be construed as the constricted path.

Thirdly, it is important to recognize that the development of organizational policy, whether it be through the efforts of an education authority aiming at greater local control of education,

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the Inner London Education Authority in the City of London, England, or the Katavik School Board in Northern Quebec, is dependent upon the awareness that good policies emerge as a result of the policy process. Policies do not occur by default, through good fortune, or accident -- although all three of these factors have doubtless contributed to policy development from time to time, for sometimes when the convenient policy levers are pulled out of desperation, the outcomes may be appropriate to what was intended.

Simply put, it must be remembered that the largest part of the intelligence of policy-making is the awareness on the part of policy actors and decision-makers that they are a part of the policy process. And, that further to this, the development of awareness of the policy process is an integral part of the development of policy expertise. If the object of improving policy expertise is to enhance the rationality of the policy making abilities of policy actors, then it would seem that understanding more of what policy is and what the policy process is can only aid in this regard. It is the development of policy expertise, and the encouragement of awareness of the policy process, which this paper has addressed. Such awareness does much to prevent the scenarios of "dazzling configurations of unintended results" commented upon by Waller (1983) at the beginning of this paper.

Conclusion

This paper has reviewed meanings of the term "policy" and provided an elaborated model of the "policy process." It has also drawn implications for native Indian control of Indian education. It is hoped that these explications have addressed the two assumptions that served as the underpinnings of this

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paper. Hopefully this paper has allowed "policy" as a concept to be slightly better understood, and "policy" as a process similarly to be slightly better understood -- and it is hoped that such better understanding may lead to growth in policy literacy and expertise, to improvement in the tools of educational governance, so strengthening the movement toward Indian control of Indian education.

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